



Lake Mead National Recreation Area Environmental Education



FIELD PROGRAM

Grade 4

“Hiking through History”

Take a hike through history and discover the Historic Railroad Trail. Follow the trail along the old railroad grade and learn about events that shaped Southern Nevada.

THEME

The U.S. Government Railroad Trail allows us to walk “back in time” to experience a significant part of Southern Nevada history.

OBJECTIVES

Students will describe why the U.S. Government Railroad was built. Students will relate the building of the Hoover Dam to the creation of Lake Mead National Recreation Area, the country’s first National Recreation Area. Students will begin to understand how the decision to build the Hoover Dam affected the way we live in our desert environment today.

VOCABULARY

cultural resource - any physical evidence of historic events
historic - an event that was important in the past or will be seen as important in the future
history - the study of past events relating to the life or development of a people or country
reservoir - a natural or artificial holding area for storing a large amount of water

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Many events shaped the Southern Nevada that we live in today, but few rival the changes brought about by the completion of the Hoover Dam in 1935. Who could have ever imagined then that a small desert oasis town could become one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas the United States by 1999. It all began with an idea to “tame the mighty Colorado River” and could not have been possible without the U.S. Government Railroad. This railroad was significant among Nevada railroads because it was government built and owned and served no commercial purpose. It was built solely to serve the construction of the Hoover Dam and then later used for maintenance and repair of the dam. It was operated by a group of six companies. Use of the railroad began in September 1931 and continued until 1961 after the last generator unit was installed at the dam. The tracks were dismantled and sold for scrap.

On September 30, 1935, President Roosevelt dedicated the dam and on October 26, 1936 the first electric generator went into operation. It took close to five years for the Colorado River to fill the reservoir that we now know as Lake Mead. Much of the U.S. Government Railroad grade is submerged under the water of Lake Mead. After years of joint management of Lake Mead between the Bureau of Reclamation and the National Park Service, in October 1964 Congress designated Lake Mead and Lake Mohave (south of the Hoover Dam) as the country's first National Recreation Area managed by the National Park Service.

BEFORE THE FIELD TRIP ACTIVITY

Have your students create a journal in preparation for their trip to Lake Mead NRA. Journals provide a means of recording observations in the field and can be accessed at a later date for comparison studies. Before the trip take a few minutes to discuss with your students what they most enjoy about living in the Mojave Desert. Have them make a list in their journals. Please be sure that the students bring their journals on the day of the field trip.

AFTER THE FIELD TRIP ACTIVITY

As future managers, what kinds of decisions would you make regarding the problems facing those in charge of managing the Colorado River. Would you make similar decisions today?

REFERENCES

Myrick, David F., *Railroads of Nevada and E. California Vol II*
University of Nevada Press (1992)

Compressed Air Magazine, *The Story of the Hoover Dam*
Nevada Publications (1935)

Stephens, Joseph E., *Hoover Dam An American Experience*
University of Oklahoma Press (1988)

MAKING A DIFFERENCE! Your students can begin to make a difference wherever they live! Have your class come up with a project using the experience from their field trip to Lake Mead National Recreation Area to show others that they care about our desert community.



Teachers! - check out our new web site with an extensive classroom section:
<http://www.nps.gov/lame/classroom>

